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Building An Interdisciplinary Production Program

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PROJECT TITLE: BUILDING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY PRODUCTION PROGRAM

CORNERSTONE III

SUBMITTED BY RUTH D. JOHNSTON, Director of Film & Screen Studies, Dyson College

DATE: May 27, 2011

Mid-Project Report

A) Original Goals

Though the long term plan is to build an interdisciplinary program focusing on disparate modes of production, the immediate goal for this Thinkfinity proposal was to get funding to purchase equipment necessary to develop courses in Sync Sound Motion Picture Production and Advanced Sound Production for Film.

B) Progress on Original Goals to date

We are keeping up with the timetable in the proposal; in fact we are ahead of schedule with the sync sound filmmaking course.

Spring 2011: 1) We eliminated the ART 289 pre-requisite for FSS 296E (16 mm Film Production) and converted it to a 4 credit course, thereby allowing students to learn the use of Final Cut Pro Software as well as to focus on contemporary filmmaking production practices rather than video.

2) We ordered and arranged for delivery of all the sync sound equipment purchased with the Thinkfinity funds by the end of the Fall 2010 semester, so we were able to offer a 3-credit Independent Study (FSS 395) for four advanced FSS students who met the requirements for enrolling in an independent study and who had successfully completed FSS 296E (16 mm Film Production). This independent study functioned as a “dress rehearsal” for the 4 credit sync sound class, which is being offered as a regular course (FSS 296F) next fall.

Fall 2011: 1) The 4-credit 16 mm Film Production course has been approved by Deans’ Council as a permanent FSS course and has been assigned the number FSS 204. However, students had already registered for the fall course under its old number, FSS 296E, so the new number will go into effect in Spring 2012. Based on last semester’s experience, we decided to restrict the class to sophomores and higher classes and to require both the approval of the Director of FSS and ENG 120 as pre-requisite, thereby insuring greater maturity of the students who enroll. (The equipment is very expensive and requires careful handling, especially since students are allowed to borrow it to shoot assignments.)

2) FSS 296F (Filmmaking: Image and Sound), 4 credits, is being launched next fall. The pre-requisite is FSS 296E and the approval of the Director of FSS.

C) Impact on students? How many?

1) The most immediate impact is on the students enrolled in the courses described above (16 total), who learn, through direct performance, the duties of director, director of photography, sound recordist, gaffer (lighting technician), and boom operator. FSS 296E students completed 3 short films, developed proficiency with 16 mm cameras and professional equipment, writing technique, non-linear digital editing. In the sync sound class students co-produced 2 projects, developed proficiency with both an Arri BL 16 mm sync sound camera and a Panasonic HD/DV camcorder, Sennheizer shotgun and lav mics and field sound package, Marantz Digital Field Recorder, Arri professional lighting package, Sekonic light meter. All the students learned that filmmaking is a collaborative art and that multiple forms of expertise are part of film art. These students also learned from one another via critique of one another's work.

2) But the impact is much broader in fact because Professor Frank Martinelli, who teaches our production courses, arranges a screening of students' films at the end of each semester, which inspires other FSS majors as well as students in other majors; it fosters relations with faculty from other departments as well as Pace staff, e.g., Ed Media, the computer center, Birnbaum Library; it builds relations with FSS alumni; and it involves parents in Dyson events. On December 17 the screening was held in Lecture Hall West, and the audience numbered approximately 80 people (every seat in the house was filled, and some guests had to sit on the steps), including other faculty from FSS and ENG, librarians, some parents, some alumni who had taken the 16 mm course, FSS students (all of whom were invited), Theatre students (many of whom acted in the films).

The screening on May 16 was also well attended, but the audience was smaller because many students went home at the end of finals. There were approximately 35 people in the audience, again FSS students, some parents, professors from FSS and Sociology, Nickie Foster from Admissions, Theatre Students.

D) Impact on other faculty? (See C.2 above.)

1) Please note that this project takes interdisciplinarity to higher level insofar as the scholarly community is extended beyond faculty and students to include Pace staff.

2) Nor is the impact of the project limited to current students. I screen these films at Pace's Open House and Preview Weekends. At the beginning of the screening session, I describe the interdisciplinary nature of Pace's Film and Screen Studies Major and I explain that in terms of production, interdisciplinarity translates into multimedia: in addition to our 16 mm film production courses, FSS currently counts as electives production and studio courses in other departments, e.g., ART and MCA. In short, these film production courses also contribute to the recruitment of students to Pace, not only to the FSS Major but to other departments and schools as well. A number of prospective students report that they are attracted to Pace because of this interdisciplinary approach.

D) Next Steps?

We will carefully monitor the two film production courses in Fall 2011, especially FSS 296F, which will be officially launched. Unfortunately, we are hampered from advancing as much as we could because we lack the faculty and equipment to do so. Regarding the latter, I will apply for another Thinkfinity Grant next fall to supplement our equipment so that we can run larger classes (16 cap). Furthermore, we need staff to supervise the use and loan of equipment. However, regarding faculty, though I applied for a full-time lectureship for our Production instructor, Dyson did not give me the funds, and Professor Martinelli is therefore limited in the number of credits he can teach each semester. Consequently, though Dyson is strongly promoting freshmen learning communities, and though we are eager to develop an LC in collaboration with the Theatre department, we do not have the faculty to assign to such a course. The Dyson Dean's Office advises applying again next year for funding for the full-time lectureship.